

2 Kyarra Road
GLEN IRIS SE 6 Victoria
January 1966

Dear

I feel honored that you should, so soon, acknowledge my earlier letter particularly as you have asked for further information.

My time with Q.E.A. undoubtedly stands out in my mind as the most rewarding period of 50 years employment in various capacities. There was discipline and rightly so but there was ample opportunity for and encouragement of independent thought. Suggestions with regard not only to my primary job as Senior Radio Officer but to flying and navigation too were always given full consideration and, in several instances, adopted. As you know I was never given command of a DH86 in the strict sense of the word. I have it on record, however, that Lester Brain considered me to be a very good pilot and on several occasions I did for all practical purposes take over the Captain's job for a trip to or from Singapore. Lester Brain and Bert Hussey were the two Captains who had most faith in me as a pilot although, strange as it might seem, Ron Adair was often glad to seek my opinion when things got a bit sticky. Ron was probably a good pilot but he was a careless navigator and once or twice I managed to pull him out of a hole. The real test of pulling a Captain out of a hole, however, came on the occasion of the "lost and found" episode at Darwin and about which I wrote in my previous letter. Bert Hussey was the Captain on that occasion and, although Bert never mentioned the episode to me once we had landed at Darwin, I'm egotistical enough to believe that it was my knowledge of the vagaries of radio and the exercise of some common sense at that stage that saved us from a forced landing somewhere "out in the mulga south of Darwin".

But I'm idly chatting and not providing the information you have sought.

I have prepared several separate papers which I will attach to this note. Some of the material will not be of real value to you. Some of it, however, might "ring a bell" and give you a starting point for deeper investigation. If anything that I have provided, am providing herewith, or perhaps could provide at your request, proves useful I shall be completely satisfied. All that I aim to do is to give back to Q.E.A. through you a very small measure of the help and cooperation and rewarding employment that Q.E.A. gave to me.

Thank you again for your kind letter,

with kind regards,

A LITTLE HUMOR

After I had been on DH86s for a year or so, L.J. one day asked if I was endorsed for the Fox Moth as a taxi job was available. Upon advising I.J. that I was not so endorsed he told me to be at Archerfield next morning when he would give me two or three landings in a DH60 with a view to taking up the Fox. In due course I.J. and I took our seats in the DH60 (VH-UGW) and I was instructed to take off which I did. I.J. had very little to say so I flew around for a while until he said I was to go back and land which I did. Still L.J. had very little to say and I began to wonder whether I had completely blotted my copy book. However he did tell me to taxi in which I did, and stopped the motor. It was not until then that I.J. told me he did not have a 'stick' in the front seat - he had been my unwilling passenger completely at my mercy. Anyway, all was well. I was sent off to do a couple more solo landings in VH-UGW and then presented with the Fox (VH-UZC) for more (successful) landings.

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Once, when flying with Bill Crowther, we had been delayed at Longreach westbound due to aerodrome flooding. After waiting for the runways to appear above the water we got off but got only as far as Daly Waters and without sufficient daylight to go on to Darwin. Next day we made Keepang and the day after that made Batavia. By now we were two days behind schedule so decided to make a very early start from Batavia next morning. The weather to the north was overcast with little flickers of lightning on track. After about half an hour in the air, still in complete darkness, we ran into torrential rain and quite severe lightning together with considerable turbulence. With no forecast for the weather ahead and completely unaware of the distance to be flown before we would run out of the stinking weather, we decided to go back to Batavia. Bill called to me for a course to steer which I put on the compass and Bill started to edge the aircraft round on to the new heading. We had been flying on the new heading for, perhaps, 3 or 4 minutes when it dawned upon me that the thunderstorm which should now be behind us was in fact on, or nearly on, our beam. The storm just could not have moved so fast so something else was amiss. Suddenly I realised I had put the 'miles' instead of the 'track' on the compass. Fortunately for me at that stage Bill handed the aircraft over to me whereupon I 'sneaked' the proper heading on the compass and made for Batavia. I'm not sure that Bill ever knew what I had done. We reached Batavia quite safely but I learned a lesson I've never forgotten. It was, however, a rotten but fortunately relatively short trip - complete darkness; heavy lightning which not only half blinded us but completely cut out all radio communications; torrential rain that sounded like a mob of goats on our fabric skin and which found every little seepage hole above our heads; no knowledge of what lay ahead, and by that time little knowledge of what lay behind us. That was on January 10 1937, aircraft VH-USE, crew W.H. Crowther in command, Stevens First Officer.

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Once when flying with Russel Tapp, having run up the motors and having got everything ready to leave Longreach for Brisbane, I went in search of Captain Tapp to report "All ready". It was still dark. I eventually found Russel pacing to and fro behind the hangar with a strained look on his face. His response to my report that all was ready for departure was somewhat terse and very much to the point; he said "To hell with the departure. We can't go yet. I haven't had my morning call". Russell was one of the old-time pilots who seemingly could not appreciate the luxury of a toilet aboard the DH86s !!!

A FEW STATISTICS

I have been asked, what were your flying hours in the early days of Q.E.A., and what was your normal air speed in the DH86? Over a period, from June 1936 to January 1937 inclusive (8 months) I had kept an accurate log of distances, times, etc so I could, and can, give a pretty accurate picture on those two points. The whole of the five DH86's were involved and as, generally speaking, there were only 5 crews involved during that period, my figures fairly accurately cover a fifth of all flying during that 8 months period. It can, therefore I suggest, fairly accurately speak for all Q.E.A. flying on the Brisbane-Singapore route from June 1st 1936 to January 31 1937. The following figures represent my personal experience. Miles are nautical. Flying times are from wheels off to touch-down. Average speeds are in nautical miles per hour:

Period	Track miles	Flight time		Average G.S.
		Hrs	mins	
June 1936	13388	98	15	135.5
July "	10750	78	30	135.5
Aug "	8722	63	26	136
Sep "	15416	113	10	137
Oct "	10750	79		135
Nov "	12086	93	25	131
Dec "	5358	41		130
Jan 1937	<u>13176</u>	<u>103</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>127</u>
	<u>89646</u>	<u>670</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>133.37</u>

I have endeavored to find a reason for the falling off of the average ground speed during the months Nov. Dec and Jan. but without a positive answer. It is interesting to note, however, that most of my hours in the air during those months were spent with Scottie Allen in command. Now Scottie was very fuel conscious and never used a quart if a pint would do. He was very particular about the setting of the mixture controls so much so that his attitude to this aspect became something of a burden when he left the flying to his second 'dickie' and when various altitudes were being flown. I rather suspect that the lower average ground speeds shown up above could have been due to a consistent loss of a few 'revs' due in turn to a slightly weaker than usual mixture. There is nothing in my log that suggests that weather had any bearing on the overall picture during those 3 months.

As you will recall, the DH86s were critical in fore and aft trim. I had a scale worked out for each of the 5 DH86s. Unfortunately that information was in the book that I cannot find. With so much weight in the back locker there was a need for a certain other weight in the nose locker something in the vicinity of, for example, 350 lbs in the back and 110 in the nose. I have forgotten the fine details but I do remember that VH-UUA was the less critical of all our DH86s. Plus or minus 40 or 50 lbs did not make much difference. From memory VH-USE was the most critical of all. She was so critical that a newspaper moved from the back to the front (almost) upset the trim. But they were lovely old aeroplanes for their time in aviation history provided you commanded them and did not allow them for a minute to take charge of you. One certainly could not sit back and read a newspaper when flying a DH86.

A NEWS "SCOOP"

April 23 1936, aircraft VH-USD, crew L.J.Brain in command, F.W.Stevens First Officer. Passengers two newspaper reporters.

A R.A.A.F. Dragon Rapide had force landed somewhere south of Darwin believed to be in the general vicinity of Newcastle Waters. The R.A.A.F. knew the location of the aircraft but they would not give information on the location to the Press. A Sydney newspaper decided to find out for itself something about the crash landing. Brain and I, with VH-USD, were the stand-by in Darwin for the Eastbound flight from Singapore next day. The newspaper chartered the aircraft. We left Darwin on April 23 1936 with two newspaper reporters aboard soon after daylight. We went straight to Newcastle Waters hoping to get a clue on the location of the crashed Rapide but the R.A.A.F. had put a tight measure of security around the whole thing. However, the "bush telegraph" had reached a drover with a mob of cattle near the aerodrome and we soon found out from him that the Rapide was in scrub not far from Newcastle Waters along the Murrumbidgee Track. We got back into the air as soon as we had refuelled and soon were flying over the Rapide. The mid-day turbulence low down was quite severe and soon the newspaper reporters were violently ill. However, they prepared between them in serial form a story which they handed to me. As each section of the story was handed up, I transmitted it by wireless to Darwin for onward transmission by landline to Sydney. I never did see the complete article in newspaper form but it has always been my understanding that the story that I transmitted from VH-USD over the Murrumbidgee Track appeared in a Sydney newspaper that same evening before we returned to Darwin.

(It could be interesting in retrospect to find out if Q.E.A. were paid for the Press messages sent by wireless from their aircraft on this occasion. I am by no means sure of the identity of the newspaper concerned but I have a vague idea that it was the "SUN". I'd recognise the name of one of the reporters if I were to hear it but I cannot at this stage remember it).... Upon further reflection I rather suspect that the name of the reported was Waterman)

THE FIRST OFFICIAL Q.E.A. AIR MAIL SERVICE, WESTBOUND

February 22 1935. Aircraft VH-USF. Crew L.J.Brain in command,
F.W.Stevens First Officer. Departed Darwin for
Singapore, refueling en-route at Koepang, Rambang,
Sourabaya and Batavia (Djakarta). Passenger
Sir Edward Campbell.

FIRST OFFICIAL Q.E.A. AIRMAIL SERVICE, EASTBOUND.

February 26 1935, Aircraft VH-USF. Crew L.J.Brain in command,
F.W.Stevens First Officer. arrived DARWIN .

(Another crew, the details of which I unfortunately
do not have, took the mail southward leaving
Darwin on February 27 1935.

FIRST BRITISH AIRCRAFT TO LAND AT BALI.

May 20 1935, Aircraft VH-USC. Crew L.J.Brain in command,
F.W.Stevens First Officer, passengers nil. We made an
exploratory landing at Bali to test it for possible
use in an emergency or for emergency refueling. The
approaches were not attractive and I doubt that a
Q.E.A. aircraft ever landed there again. However, on
December 20 1935 Bert Hussey in VH-USE made an
inspection of Bali from the air. Other Captains might
also have done so but on this point I have no data.

"LOST AND FOUND" (The story already supplied)

August 27 1935, aircraft VH-UUA, Crew H.B.Hussey in command,
F.W.Stevens First Officer.

(Scottie Allan might be able to add something to
the story I have already provided. Scottie was the
stand-by Captain at Darwin and took the service
south next morning. During the "lost and found"
episode Scottie took a DH86 over Darwin and
above the smoke haze and fired several very
lights in the hope that we in UUA might see those
lights. We did not see the lights as, upon
retracing our steps on paper after landing, we
had been at that time somewhere in the vicinity
of _____ miles, _____ degrees ~~from~~ magnetic from
Darwin.

NOTABLE PASSENGERS CARRIED.

March 23 1936, aircraft VH-USE, Crew R.Tapp in command,
F.W.Stevens First Officer. Carried as passengers
from Singapore to Batavia (Djakarta) the film
personalities Charlie Chaplain and Paulette Goddard.
The feature of this note is that, although we had a
particularly "dirty" trip mostly in heavy and
turbulent rain and the first hour in darkness, both
these passengers thanked us for a pleasant trip and
assured us they would travel again with Q.E.A. They
were both very pleasant and friendly passengers.